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Campbell and Reps. Tom Price (Ga.) and Marsha Blackburn (Tenn.) have interviewed for the job with the party's founders, and some Republican aides say they think Campbell hurt his chances by breaking with the RSC pack, including its chairman, Rep. Jeb Hensarling (Texas), by quickly embracing the bailout.

Some GOP aides said Price appears to have the inside track, although several RSC members say they have not made up their minds and won't make a decision until after the November elections. The RSC vote won't be until after the leadership elections.

Campbell said he thought he still had a chance despite his differences with other RSC members on the bailout — which he considers an urgent need to avert a financial crisis.

"I'm still in it," he said. Campbell noted that he has been an out-front opponent of earmarks, which has been a cause célèbre among the RSC's leadership but not for all its members.

He acknowledged that he differs with most RSC members on the bailout, which he considers an urgent need to avert a financial catastrophe.

Former Chairman Mike Pence (R-Ind.), a leading opponent of the bailout, said Campbell's position on that issue should not disqualify him.

"I think it's wide open," Pence said. He noted that he had supported an immigration reform proposal at odds with the GOP when he was chairman.

"I don't think any one issue bears upon the next RSC chairman," Pence said. "There are three outstanding candidates."

Campbell critics also said he has irked the RSC's conservative core by supporting an earlier

housing bailout package and legislation prohibiting workplace discrimination against gays.

Price exceeded many of the party's summer protests on oil drilling, which some credit with helping focus attention on the issue, while Members say Blackburn is a strong communicator and a consistent conservative who still is in the mix.

Rep. Dan Burton (Ind.), one of the RSC's founders who is interviewing the candidates, said he hasn't made up his mind.

Burton said he's looking for someone with leadership experience, perhaps in the private sector.

Burton added his choice will "have to have impeccable conservative credentials, and they need to know they have to have the RSC membership behind them before they make statements. Some chairmen have made statements, and then they looked over their shoulder and the cavalry wasn't there."